IAC Activities

An important part of NASA's educational effort is the work of the agency's 10 Industrial Application Centers (IACs). In addition to their principal job of providing technical assistance to U.S. industry, the IACs are engaged in a variety of educational programs, such as sponsoring seminars, workshops, open houses and executive briefings, conducting tours of NASA facilities for school science classes, holding educator conferences, and providing courses in space technology for college undergraduate and graduate level students.

One of the IACs is the Southern Technology Applications Center (STAC), Alachua, Florida; one of STAC's six regional offices is located at the University of South Florida (USF). A couple of STAC sample activities offer examples of the type of contribution the IACs are making.

STAC sponsored a one-day seminar titled "Technology, NASA and You—Imagine the Possibilities," aimed at generating technology awareness among several levels of the community—educators, manufacturers, small business operators, students, etc. Former astronaut Lodewijk van den Berg talked on living and working in space. Leslie Neihouse, director of the U.S. Space Camp, Titusville, Florida, spoke on "Education, the Next High Tech Generation." Experts from NASA and the National Institute of Standards and Technology discussed technologies available for transfer and told businessmen how to take advantage of technology transfer opportunities.

The program also featured a demonstration of an artificial intelligence software shell, success stories about commercialization of NASA technology, a display of commercial spinoffs, and videos of Space Shuttle operations and the Factory of the Future.

A highlight of the day was an exercise taken from the Space Camp curriculum: students of two area schools, East Bay High and Eisenhower Junior High, accepted the challenge of designing and building a space station model in one hour.

Another STAC activity, conducted for the USF Center for Creativity, Innovation and Leadership, which coordinates the Florida Governor's Summer Program, was the "From Ideas to Dollars Workshop." This program sought to point up the economic benefits of aerospace technology transfer by challenging 10 groups of 12-14 year old students to develop a strategy for commercializing a new space-derived product—including applications, identification of target markets, cost/pricing analysis, selection of distribution channels, etc. The "Ideas to Dollars" challenge was subsequently repeated at the Lee Academy for Academically Gifted Students, Tampa, Florida.

STAC and other IACs continue to develop new mechanisms like these to stimulate general interest in aerospace technology transfer and student interest in science and mathematics.

At a Florida seminar, students use Ramegon materials to build a space station model of their own design.

Photo by Gordon Myrhe

Students of Florida's Lee Academy discuss a challenging assignment: develop a complete plan for commercializing a new NASA technology.